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INFO RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHDC  
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 4528  
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SENSITIVE  
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DEPT FOR NEA/REA and OES/ENV  
USDA FOR FAS/OCBD/DRDAD  
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TAGS: [SENV](#) [EAGR](#) [EINV](#) [IS](#)  
SUBJ: Knesset Seeks Scapegoats for Water Crisis

Ref: (A)Tel Aviv 1211 (B)Tel Aviv 242 (C)Tel Aviv 678

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. The Israeli water crisis is turning political as the Knesset decided to form a special committee to determine who is culpable for the present water shortage. Sitting GOI ministers endorse the effort, which is likely to fault previous administrations for their decisions to delay funding and construction of additional desalination plants and infrastructure projects. Comment: Although the present government would like to see its predecessors faulted, there is plenty of blame to spread among all parties, as well as poor consumer practices and possibly changing weather patterns. The water crisis may become an issue in Israel's coming domestic political reshuffling. End Summary.

12. (U) The State Control Committee of Israel's parliament (Knesset) ordered the establishment of a special investigative committee to review the origins of the serious water crisis facing Israel. In requesting the investigation, the Knesset watchdog committee decided that it was necessary to examine the failure to implement the recommendations of many professional committees and previous government decisions on the subject. After Israel's last water crisis in 2002, the cabinet decided to establish large-scale desalinization plants and targeted water conservation savings to reduce household water use by at least 10 percent. In the intervening years, however, neither happened. The special committee investigating this lapse will also be requested to formulate recommendations for the short and long-term in order to ensure the regular supply of water to the citizens of the State.

13. (U) Zvulon Orlev, Chairman of the Control Committee, said that the water crisis is not an unexpected accident, but rather results from serious failures by generations of governments of Israel. (Post has outlined the evolution of the present crisis in reftels.) Orlev and some media analyses have faulted the Ministry of Finance for preferring immediate economic considerations over long-term needs. In the quest for balanced budgets, he claims the Finance Ministry chose not to undertake the required investment in desalination facilities, in rehabilitation of the aquifer, in more water treatment plants, and in effective water conservation programs.

14. (SBU) Sitting Minister of National Infrastructure Binyamin Ben-Eliezer favors formation of the special committee. In a public statement he was adamant about determining the individuals at fault. The best defense of his administration, he implied, is to have the blame placed on those responsible - those previously in office. Although last winter's disappointing rainfall - just 65 percent of normal - may appear the proximate cause, Ben Eliezer points to the longer term problems of pollution of reservoirs, overpumping from deep water sources, and the decision four years ago to cancel plans to build additional desalination installations. Had those investments been made, the new facilities would shortly be coming

on-line. Lack of a clear public conservation campaign until now is one charge leveled against the government that even the present minister cannot dodge.

15. (SBU) Comment: The water issue has now been seized as a political football with which to score points. Eliezer tries to gain points for candor and good management, Knesset opponents try to score for activism on a key issue and stress the Kadima government's inability to redress the situation. Given that the weakened Olmert government is heading into party and probably national elections, the water crisis may become more highly politicized in coming months.

MORENO